

UAC/MUSKET presents **CHESS**

the musical by

Benny Andersson

Tim Rice

Bjorn Ulvaeus

Anderson - 8:42 Mon  
Room 9:15-10:15  
Ballroom

Power Center for the Performing Arts

Auditions: Monday-Thursday, January 27, 28, 29, 30

First Rehearsal: Sunday, February 2

Performances: Thursday-Saturday, March 19, 20, 21 at 8PM

Jason Hackner, Producer

David Kirshenbaum, Director

Elizabeth Rossi, Choreographer and Associate Director

Lynne Shankel, Musical Director

Matt Shible, Stage Manager and Scenic Designer

## **ABOUT THE SHOW...**

CHESS was the brainchild of the distinguished British lyricist Tim Rice, who wanted to follow up his first three hugely successful musicals (Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Jesus Christ Superstar and Evita, all written with composer Andrew Lloyd Webber) with a contemporary story that dealt with East-West tension. At first, he apparently considered the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis as a possibility for musical treatment, but fortunately Rice hit upon the idea of using the sport of chess as a metaphor for the political gamesmanship that goes on between our countries' governments. From here, the basic pieces of his original story fell quickly into place: a Soviet grandmaster defects to the West during a World Chess Championship match with a temperamental American player.

Andrew Lloyd Webber was unavailable to write the music, having already begun work on transforming T.S. Eliot's "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats" into the worldwide blockbuster musical sensation that it later became. So, after a brief attempt to strike up a collaboration with Marvin Hamlisch (composer of A Chorus Line), Rice finally chose two very talented men as his co-writers on the show.....Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus (the two "B"s in the late-1970s Swedish pop group ABBA) had long wanted to stretch their composing talents by writing something for the stage, and CHESS provided them with the ideal opportunity.

As he had done with Jesus Christ and Evita, Rice began by releasing an album of the full score before it had even been staged, a sort of professional "demo" recording (known in the field as a "concept album"). The process worked, as it had before. First of all, the critical response to the music helped them gauge the quality of the writing, and led them to fine-tune the work before launching into a full production. And more importantly, the enormous commercial success of the album helped them raise money for what ultimately proved to be a \$6 million show.



It is perhaps from this first recording that most people know of CHESS, for many of the songs were released as singles (with MTV music videos, of course) and a few of them became tremendously popular, including the lovely ballad "I Know Him So Well" (which was a #1 hit in England and was recorded in this country by such singers as Whitney Houston and Barbra Streisand) and the international smash rap number, "One Night in Bangkok" (which was a Top 10 tune in the United States for several months in the middle of 1986). Needless to say, not all the music is written in such a "pop" mode, and for Time Magazine to call it "the finest rock score ever produced for the theatre" is perhaps a bit of a disservice, since it is in many ways the freshest, liveliest, and most diverse blend of melodies, rhythms, and styles heard in a musical for many, many years.

The show itself has had a somewhat tortured history, for while the original 1986 London version was a huge hit, running for over three years, subsequent productions have not been as wildly successful. Consequently, the story and score have undergone extensive revision nearly every time the musical has been produced: first, for the 1988 Broadway stand, which fizzled out after two months; next, for a one-night concert presentation which played Carnegie Hall on January 9, 1989; then, for an aborted 1990 cross-country national tour (which briefly stopped at the Wharton Center here in Michigan); and again for productions as far afield as Sydney, Australia and San Bernardino Civic Light Opera in California. Now, CHESS is finally on its way back to New York, as it is presently in rehearsal for a new version opening at The Artists' Perspective off-Broadway in the first week of February (the same week we begin rehearsals for our production).

UAC/MUSKET has been very lucky in being one of the first universities to successfully obtain the amateur rights for the Broadway version of CHESS, the version which was the most dramatically successful (at least in terms of the writing), and which contained the best of the very bountiful score. CHESS is a long show, clocking in at over three hours; it is also, as Time noted, "an angry, difficult, demanding and rewarding show, one that pushes the boundaries of the form." Moreover, it will be one of the most technically complex student productions ever presented at this University. As such, MUSKET needs your help, whether as a performer, musician, or tech assistant (costumes, sets, lighting). We're looking for a cast of more than three dozen, an orchestra of between 16 and 20, and as many behind-the-scenes helping hands as we can get. So please, sign up to audition, put your name down as a volunteer, and then tell all your friends to do the same; we know we're going to have a great time, and we look forward to working with as many of you as we can on this very challenging, very fulfilling piece of musical theatre.

For the cast, in particular, the show makes fairly strenuous demands in terms of singing, acting, and movement. For this reason, it is essential that we have a cast that is enthusiastic, flexible, talented and committed to putting on a great show and having a great time. Accordingly, the auditions will be quite exhaustive and a bit complex, spread out over four days.



## **CHESS AUDITION INFORMATION**

- Monday and Tuesday, January 27-28:

SINGING/ACTING AUDITIONS - Anderson Room, Michigan Union

- Wednesday, January 29:

DANCE AUDITIONS - Ballroom, Michigan Union

- Thursday, January 31:

CALLBACKS - Anderson Room, Michigan Union

To be considered for the cast of our show, it is mandatory that you come to a singing and acting audition on either Monday or Tuesday, and the dance audition on Wednesday (as well as a callback if it is asked of you), even if you only wish to perform as a dancer or ensemble member. We want a full, well-rounded cast, and if you're self-conscious about your singing voice, or you've never auditioned with a monologue before, or if you think you don't move very well, it should not discourage you from auditioning in the least.

Because the rehearsal period is so short (five weeks) and the cast so large (between 30-40 people), outside conflicts must be kept to a minimum, and it is important that we know all your other commitments at the time of your audition.

### **Singing/Acting Auditions**

On Monday, January 27 and Tuesday, January 28 we will be seeing people at individual audition appointments that should be scheduled in advance (beginning Wednesday, January 15, there will be sign-up sheets at the UAC office in the Michigan Union). Each person will be given 4 minutes to sing two prepared musical selections and read a prepared monologue. You can use this time however you like, but a good guideline would be to spend about 3 minutes for the two songs and no more than 60 seconds for your monologue. We will obviously be pressed for time, so don't despair if by some chance we cut you off early from one of your chosen selections. Reading the character descriptions may give you an idea of appropriate audition material, but it also couldn't hurt for you to listen to the album or read the script prior to your appointment.

There are two albums of CHESS, the original "concept" album and the Broadway cast recording; both have good and bad things to be said for them, but you should be able to find one or the other on cassette or CD at such stores as Schoolkids Records (on Liberty Street), Discount Records (on State Street) and either Warehouse Records or Tower Records on South University; give them a call, as they all answer questions over the phone. There will also be copies of the script placed on reserve at both the UAC office in the Michigan Union and the Theatre Department office in the Frieze Building on or by Tuesday, January 21, and you may borrow them briefly to look over. Please return the script by 5:00PM on the day you borrow it, so that it may be loaned out to others the following morning.

A good guideline for your audition songs would be to do one from a musical and one that is something more of a pop tune, though this distribution is not a necessity; the only request is that you sing nothing



from CHESS, since we will be assigning songs from the show for callbacks (if you feel that CHESS material is the music that you feel most comfortable with, or that shows you off to maximum advantage, you may do something from the show; use your discretion, as we may or may not ask you to then sing the same song again at callbacks). Appropriate ideas for audition choices may be found in the theatre scores of Richard Maltby, Jr. and David Shire (Closer Than Ever, Baby and Starting Here, Starting Now), Stephen Schwartz (The Magic Show, The Baker's Wife and Pippin), as well as a lot of the material from shows as diverse as The Wiz, Miss Saigon, Working, Song and Dance and Falsettoland. In the world of pop songs, it might be good to look at material by such songwriter/performers as Billy Joel, Elton John, Carly Simon, James Taylor and Stevie Wonder.

If you are having trouble finding songs, do try the Ann Arbor Public Library, which has a decent selection of popular music, or King's Keyboard on Liberty Street. Failing all this, we will have the complete works of Billy Joel available at our auditions, as well as a collection of standard Broadway material, so even if you can't prepare both of your two songs in advance, sign up anyway for an appointment time and we'll take it from there.

PLEASE know the full name of the song(s), the authors, what show it's from, if any (or who recorded it) and roughly when it was written.

The acting segment of the audition is fairly simple: a very brief (preferably no more than one minute) monologue from a play written in the last quarter-century or so; if you're having trouble finding a monologue, or if you don't even know where to begin looking, there will be a packet of possible options from recent plays put on reserve at the UAC office by Tuesday, January 21. Any of the monologues in that packet would be fine, but you can feel free to audition with any kind of material you like (comedic, tragic, romantic, melodramatic).

[Even you are auditioning for any other shows this month (i.e. Pol Joey, As You Like It), feel free to sign up for an audition appointment at any time; however, as we don't want to have a lot of no-shows at our auditions, please do us the common courtesy of telephoning UAC immediately and leaving a message if you do get cast in another commitment. The cast lists for those shows will be announced by the middle of our audition week, so in the event that you do not get cast, there will definitely still be time available to audition for us.]

### **Dance Auditions**

On Wednesday night, January 29, we will be holding dance auditions in the Ballroom at the Michigan Union. Dancers will be taught a short combination to music from the show, and will then perform it in small groups.

For the dance evening, long hair should be pulled back/put up, and you should wear clothes that you feel comfortable to move in. We suggest light dance clothing such as tights and leotards, or at least shorts, T-shirts or sweats, and if you own any dance shoes, please bring them as



well (top would not be necessary). Obviously, if you don't own any of this apparel, it is not essential, and if you have no prior dance experience, please do not worry.

### **Callbacks**

On the morning of Wednesday the 29th. there will be a list and schedule posted at UAC of people who are needed for callbacks. If your name is on this list it means we need to hear you sing something for one of the characters in CHESS, and you should then go to Mary's desk in the front office of UAC, where she will have a copy of the music we would like you to prepare for the callbacks on Thursday night. For this reason, it is important to tell us at the time of your first audition if you have any conflicts on Thursday, because otherwise we will feel free to schedule you for a callback at any time. If you are not needed for a callback, it does not necessarily mean that you have been eliminated from the show.

It is also not necessary to memorize any callback music that you are given, and it will not affect our decisions either way, but if by some chance you have the time, memorization would probably allow you more freedom in your acting of the song.

### **CHARACTER BREAKDOWN -**

THE SHOW IS SET IN THE MID-1980S.

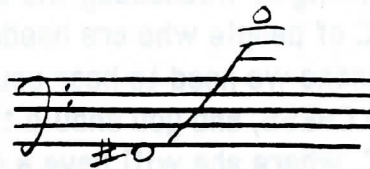
**FLORENCE.** Early thirties. she is the chess "second" and sometime lover of Freddie, the American challenger. Born in Hungary (so shouldn't necessarily look like an "All-American Girl"); has been brought up in America since 1956. She is clever, theatrical, touching, vivacious, volatile. An extremely vocally demanding role, Florence requires a strong belt voice, up to E (with head voice extension to G).



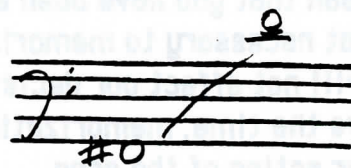
**FREDDIE.** Early thirties. An American chess champion. A cross between Bobby Fischer and John McEnroe. Arrogant and temperamental, but a genius; his chess playing is revolutionary. We need to see his artistry along with his danger and his obsessiveness. Another extremely demanding vocal role. High rock tenor.



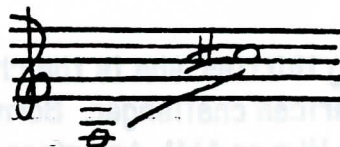
**ANATOLY.** Mid-thirties. A Russian chess champion. Drak, a bit brooding, but unexpectedly charming. He doesn't seem a romantic hero at first, but becomes one through the sheer force of his personality. An intelligent, feeling, compassionate man. A high baritone.



**MOLOKOV.** Fifties. *Not* a fake, comic, stage Russian, but a witty, intellectually formidable chess "second" to Anatoly who is in actuality a KGB agent. There is also the sense that he is, in some way, almost a father figure to Florence. A bass.



**SVETLANA.** Early thirties. Anatoly's wife. Domestic, wholesome, homey. A dramatic contrast to Florence-- *not* a contemporary cosmopolitan woman. Alto strong belt voice.



**WALTER.** Forties. A marketing agent, seemingly respectable, substantial, sincere, trustworthy. Actually, an agent for the CIA. A high baritone.



**THE ARBITER.** Thirty to forty. International businessman. Smooth, but with a quick temper. A rock high baritone.



**THE ENSEMBLE.** A very integral part of CHESS, far more so than in most recent MUSKET shows. There are many, many opportunities for smaller-sized speaking roles (agents, reporters, tourists, etc.) and for singing solos, as well as small group numbers with music ranging from a Hungarian folk song to pop/rock "back-up" vocals.